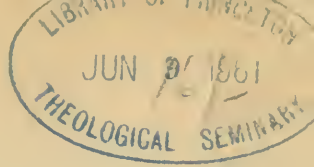




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THOUGHTS

ON THE TENDENCY OF

BIBLE SOCIETIES

AS AFFECTING THE

Established Church,

AND

CHRISTIANITY ITSELF,

AS A

“ REASONABLE SERVICE.”

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Non semper id pro optimo habendum, quod plurimos habet Laudatores.

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THOUGHTS,

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MANKIND must always have something to stare at—some bewitching object, which dazzles by its splendour, or engages by its novelty : while it lasts, the bubble of fashion will be admired ; and, when it bursts, men will wonder why they admired it at all. Sometimes an erroneous opinion, or a crude project, recommended by the designing, and patronized by the weak, is hailed by the credulity of mankind, as an emanation from the spirit of wisdom, and acted upon with a zeal proportioned to its absurdity or folly. If it be not directly mischievous, it ought, perhaps, to be tolerated in mercy to the weakness of our nature. Men, as well as children, are amused with play-things ; which, by fixing their attention, often keep them from doing or suffering injury : but when we become persuaded that a principle, however specious and popular, is not only false, but dangerous ; then the more plausible it is, and the more general its reception, the more imperative is the duty of attempting to disarm it of its sting, by exposing its falsehood, and detecting its malignity.

The British and Foreign Bible Society, with which

the Hibernian is now identified, in some points of view, is, perhaps; the noblest association that ever appeared in the world. Including its numerous branches, it comprehends a great proportion of whatever is respectable, or venerable, for property, rank, literature, or piety, within the British empire. It is the patron or parent of many similar associations in various parts of Christendom; its emissaries and agents are actively employed in both hemispheres; and its correspondence extends to the extremities of the earth. But, what eminently distinguishes this association, above all others (except the missionary societies), is the sublimity of its object—to promote the interests of Christianity at home, and impart to the deluded Mahometan, and benighted Heathen, the light of Divine revelation.

The means employed are the Scriptures “circulated without note or comment.” Of these means, indeed; the efficacy is, on mature reflection, disallowed by many, among whom is the writer of these sheets. Were he capable of surrendering his own clear conviction to any human authority, it would be to that of the Bible Society: but he knows that zeal is not always enlightened, and that the purest motives are sometimes an insufficient security against mistaken views and injudicious conduct. Nor are the number of its subscribers, and rapid growth of its branches, a proof to him of the soundness of its views; they rather afford a presumption of the contrary. Error is, in general, easily propagated in every direction, through an unresisting medium; but truth must force its way, slowly and painfully, against the tide of human corruption. What truths have

ever been so suddenly and extensively embraced, as the commercial illusions of Mr. Law, or the reveries of Peter the Hermit?

SECTION II.

The diffusion of Christian knowledge is one thing; the circulation of Bibles and Testaments another. Were it certain, or even probable, that the former would keep pace with the latter, Bible Societies ought to be hailed as the best benefactors of mankind. There is, however, reason to apprehend, that the labours of the Society will produce at home less fruit than is expected, or fruit in abundance, but of a *poisonous quality*, and be almost unproductive abroad. The Hibernian Bible Society tell us, in the first appendix to their eighth report, that the great object they have proposed to themselves, is that of “making the Bible an inmate of every house and cottage in Ireland.” But this object, if attained, can be valuable, only by leading to a more remote one—that of converting the Catholics, and enlightening the lower class of Protestants.

The circulation of the Bible may, perhaps, form an important *ingredient* in a plan for promoting Christian knowledge;—as *part of a system*, it might be indispensable; but it may be fairly doubted, whether it will, of itself, promote in any sensible degree the cause of religion and virtue. Indeed, if a sober and enlightened Christian were to follow the Scriptures into every cottage;—to read them for its inhabitants, where

they could not read for themselves—to *expound* them fully and clearly—win the attention of his hearers to the truths he delivered, from an undue anxiety about their temporal concerns;—were he to repeat his visits regularly, at short intervals, and persevere in them for years;—then indeed the cause of religious truth would be effectually promoted among the Protestants, and perhaps among the Catholics also, provided he had first converted the priest of the parish. But no provision is made for expounding the Scriptures to the people by comment, or oral instruction. This is the radical defect of the plan.

The common assertion, that the Bible is suited to all ages, capacities, and stations of life, is not true, or true only in a very restricted sense. Of all books, it is perhaps the most difficult. This is natural and unavoidable. It is the work of different men, writing in different ages, and all very remote. Some of its books are the most ancient compositions extant; and none of a later date than the first century of the Christian era. They were written in a country far remote from western Europe, whose climate, soil, animal and vegetable productions are strikingly contrasted with our own: while the laws, manners, customs, civil and military institutions, opinions, and form of government of its inhabitants, discover scarcely any resemblance to those with which we are acquainted. All these circumstances powerfully influenced their language, and produced modes of speaking, allusions, and images, obscure or unintelligible to the peasantry of modern Europe. Besides, the glowing imagination of the eastern nations was delighted with a style highly fi-

gurative, and indulged without restraint in the boldest metaphors, allegories, hyperboles, and amplifications. But necessity, as well as choice, would lead the writers of the Old Testament to adopt a style highly figurative, as that alone could enable them to pour out their exuberant conceptions, in a language deficient in copiousness. The want of appropriate words would be supplied by metaphor, and ideas sometimes communicated by external action. Most of these sources of obscurity are common to the Old and New Testament, while the latter has some peculiar to itself. Its extreme conciseness, its elliptical phraseology, frequently darken the meaning, which is still further obscured by Hebrew idioms, with which the Greek of the New Testament every where abounds.

Now all these difficulties, which the learned reader must encounter in the original languages of the Old and New Testament, are faithfully transfused into our authorized version, while many others spring up from the natural imperfection of translation. Accordingly, it is only by long and severe study, that men of the best understandings, enlarged by multifarious reading, can acquire an adequate knowledge of the sacred writings. How rarely does it happen, that men of feeble minds, and scanty literary attainments, in any rank of life, derive, by their own unassisted efforts, much information from them? And will it be seriously maintained, that the contracted mind of an ignorant peasant can, in the short intervals of a life of labour, read and comprehend, in any tolerable degree, "the high import" of these sublime and sacred books, which have given full employment, for successive years, to ca-

pacities of the highest order, enjoying unbroken leisure, improved by various knowledge, and animated by fervent piety † The supposition seems to be not only unfounded, but mischievous. It tends to withhold, from the lower class, that religious instruction, which might otherwise be imparted to them in a *more efficient form*, by the humanity of the higher orders. If the members of the Bible Society, for instance, were persuaded, that the cause of religious truth could not be much more promoted among the peasantry, by the mere circulation of Bibles and Testaments, “without note or comment,” they would, doubtless, devise more efficacious modes of instruction, which their ample funds would enable them to carry into execution. The Bible makes those who read and understand it “wise unto salvation;” but of the peasantry, all cannot read, and scarcely any can understand. The mine is rich, but the peasant wants skill to work it, and bring to light its inestimable treasures.

SECTION III.

That the Scriptures, “without note or comment,” are too obscure for the generality of mankind; has been inferred above, from the nature of the thing antecedent to experience : but, that the experience and observation of mankind lead to the same conclusion, the History of the Church, in all ages, but particularly since the Reformation, abundantly testifies. Not to mention the various sects among the Jews, and their discordant opinions, which they professed to derive principally from Scripture,

though partly from tradition, surely their gross misconception of the character of the expected Messiah is a strong fact, demonstrating, that a whole nation may fail in discovering the sense of the sacred writings, even on a subject of paramount interest.

The authority of the Apostles themselves could not prevent some of the first Christians from "wresting the Scriptures to their own destruction." The first centuries of the Christian era present to our view the endless contentions of rival sects, professing to derive their respective opinions from the sources of holy writ. These controversies were maintained, both parties appealing to the Scriptures with equal confidence, till papal Rome, in the plenitude of her power, produced an apparent conformity of sentiment, by suppressing all discussion: but, after the trumpet of Reformation sounded in the ear of Europe, and men reflected with shame and surprise on the degrading servitude which had chained down their understandings for so many ages, the mind, recovering its energies, and rallying its powers, dared once more to think and to reason. The spirit of papal usurpation fled before the dawn of returning light—the Bible re-appeared, and resumed its authority over the consciences of Christians. In opposition to the church of Rome, the first reformers loudly and justly asserted the right of private judgment, in expounding the Scriptures. Duly understood, there is no right more certain than this; but anxious to emancipate the people from the authority of the Roman pontiff, they proclaimed it without explanation or restriction, and the consequences were dreadful.

The private judgment of Munzer discovered in Scripture, that titles of nobility and large estates were "impious encroachments on the natural equality of the faithful," and invited his followers "to examine the Scriptures, whether these things were so." They examined—praised God—and proceeded with fire and sword to the extirpation of the ungodly, and the seizure of their property. Private judgment, also, thought it discovered in the Bible, that established laws were "standing restraints on Christian liberty; that the "elect of God were incapable of sinning," and may innocently obey all the propensities of their nature.

John of Leyden, laying down his thimble, and taking up his Bible, surprised the city of Munster, at the head of a rabble of frantic enthusiasts, proclaimed himself "King of Zion," and ran naked through the streets, vociferating, that "whatever was highest on earth should be brought low, and whatever was lowest should be exalted." To keep his word he made the common executioner his minister of state, and the minister of state his common executioner. Improving on the example of the patriarchs, he "took unto him" fourteen wives at once, affirming, that "polygamy was Christian liberty, and the privilege of the saints."

But if the flagitious madness of foreign peasants, *interpreting the Bible for themselves*, be afflicting to the friends of humanity and rational piety, the history of England, during a considerable part of the seventeenth century, offers little to console them. In that place and period countless enthusiasts sprung up successively and contemporaneously, endued with extravagant doctrines and noxious

propensities, in various degrees, from the wild ravings of Fox to the methodical madness of Barclay, from the formidable fanaticism of Cromwell to the drivelling impiety of Praise-God-Barebones. Piety, reason, and common sense, seemed to be driven from the world to make room for canting jargon, religious frenzy, and fiery zeal. All quoted scripture, all made pretensions to illuminations, visions, revelations, and illapses of the Spirit, and the pretensions of all were equally well-founded.

The expediency of abolishing the clerical and regal functions were strenuously maintained ; “priests being the servants of Satan, kings the delegates of the whore of Babylon, and the offices of both inconsistent with the kingdom of the Redeemer.” Convinced that intellectual improvement is the greatest enemy to fanaticism and religious imposture, the ruling zealots denounced learning as “an heathenish invention,” and the “universities as seminaries of antichristian impiety.” The sanctity of his office was no protection to the prelate ; the sacredness of majesty no defence to the king : both were scoffed at, denounced, and finally murdered by merciless fanatics, whose only book was the Bible, “without note or comment.”

At this time prayer, and preaching, and reading the Scriptures, were at their height : every man prayed : every man preached : every man read, and no man listened. In the religious drama, all were performers—there was no audience. Scripture authority was pleaded for every atrocity. The ordinary business of life was transacted in Scripture language. Words of high and sacred import were polluted by the vulgar lips of ignorant

enthusiasts. In Scripture phrase were discussed the internal state of the nation, and its external relations. In the language of scripture, conspiracies were formed, proscriptions planned, treasons hatched, and by Scripture authorities they were not only justified, but *consecrated*. "To your tents, O Israel!" was the rebel war-whoop. The rebel officer assured his men, that, as "dominion was founded in grace, the Lord would deliver the Philistines into their hands." This harangue was answered by the general shout—"Let us follow our Joshua, and smite the ungodly with the edge of the sword." To make way for "the *kingdom of Christ*," the constitution was subverted, the church destroyed, the throne overturned, and the whole frame and texture of society rent and dissolved.

SECTION IV.

These historical facts have often astonished the good and startled the pious. Engrossed by such feelings, the reader too often overlooks their awful moral—that "the Bible, without note or comment," is unfit for the perusal of the rude and illiterate. Misunderstanding its meaning, and misapplying its precepts, they will employ it to countenance every ruling passion, and sanctify every favourite vice. What has happened before may happen again: and, therefore, the Bible Society are called upon to pause, and calmly reconsider their plan of religious instruction; lest, instead of pure Christianity, they circulate hypocrisy, fanaticism, and impious delusion, among the lower classes of society.

The Bible ought to be approached, even by the wise and learned, with an humble sense of their own limited capacities. It is the charter of our salvation : the great depository of the Divine communications ; the awful code, which the Governor of the universe has issued to direct the conduct of his rational creatures, whom it addresses, in every page, as free agents, and responsible subjects, and whose belief of the great truths it reveals is made the test of their allegiance, and the foundation of their hope. Its doctrines, never contrary to reason, are sometimes above it ; its truths, generally deep, are sometimes mysterious, but always important. So that the *character* and *matter* of the sacred volume afford an additional proof of the impropriety of placing it, indiscriminately, in the hands of men, whose minds are necessarily rude and uncultivated. If they receive it, will they read it ? If they read it, will they understand it ? If they read and misunderstand it, what will be the result ? These questions honestly put, and steadily examined, by the light of reason, history, and observation, may check the Bible Societies in their incautious career.

Yet how often do we hear it asserted, that the Bible is suited to all ages, capacities, and situations ;—that “ he may run that reads it ;” —that no revelation can be obscure ; and that the affirmative of the proposition implies a contradiction. This opinion, generated by the clash of contending interests, has been transmitted from father to son without examination. In the struggle between the see of Rome and the first reformers, the champions of the former strenuously maintained, that the Holy Scriptures

were not intended for the use of the laity, but that their perusal was reserved, exclusively for the clergy, or teachers of religion, and that the church, or its organ, the Roman pontiff, was invested with the sole right of interpreting the sacred writings.

As every prospect of reformation would be blasted by the admission of this doctrine, the reformers, in opposition to it, strongly and justly maintained the right of private judgment in expounding the Scriptures: but impatient to undermine the foundation of papal jurisdiction, they maintained it, without *any* limitation, asserting that *every individual whatever* had an undoubted right to explain the Scriptures for himself. The principle, now, extended too far, was no longer tenable; so that it became necessary to fortify it with another, namely, that the Bible is an easy book, level to all capacities, and that the greatest perspicuity is the necessary character of a Divine revelation: but, neither single nor combined, are these principles capable of resisting any serious attack.

The right of private judgment, indeed, properly explained and restricted, is incontrovertible; it is the great basis of the Reformation,—the rock, on which it stands, which can never be shaken but by being misunderstood. But, in the principle itself, two things are implied; *first*, that some judgment really exists in the individual; *secondly*, that it is, in some reasonable degree, commensurate to the difficulty of the subject on which it is employed. If the judgment does not exist at all, as in the case of idiots and madmen, the right does not exist. If it exists, in an inadequate degree, Scripture—the subject on which it is exerted—will

either be not understood or misunderstood. In the former case, time will be thrown away ; in the latter, it will be dangerously employed. Now, what sort of right that is, which, when exerted, leads to the irretrievable loss of time, or to danger, whose extent and duration no human eye can foresee, I submit to the determination of the gentlemen, who write reports and addresses for the Bible Societies.

SECTION V.

Let us now consider the assumption, that perspicuity would necessarily be the character of a Divine revelation. Indeed had a revelation never been given, had it been only promised by the Creator, and expected by the creature, man's curiosity would, in the interval between the promise and its accomplishment, prompt him to hazard various conjectures respecting its nature and qualities. Among other surmises, it would probably be advanced, that all communications, from God to man, would be so clear, that their import could never be mistaken ; that God could find no pleasure in puzzling his creatures ; and that an obscure revelation would be unworthy of him, and indeed no revelation at all. This reasoning, while the world was yet expecting the promised revelation, might pass for specious argument: but now that the revelation has been given and recorded, it is both presumptuous and absurd.

What! shall man dare to infer, from his pre-conceived notions of the Deity, the character of a revelation, spread out before him in legible characters? From

what *he thinks* it *ought* to be, he must not infer what it is ; but, having read it, and thus put its obscurity or clearness to the test of experiment, he ought to conclude that, such as he *finds* it, such it *ought* to be. The writer of these sheets can affirm that, on putting the Bible to this test, by a careful perusal he found it, collectively taken, one of the most difficult books he ever read : and that this character was applicable, though in different degrees, to every part of it not purely historical. With *him* this experiment is decisive ; it convinces him, that God, for the wisest purposes, intended that the Book of our salvation should be difficult in proportion to its value. The obscurity of the Scripture prophecies is universally acknowledged, but they are as universally allowed to be Divinely revealed ; no Christian, therefore, can deny that a revelation, as such, *may* be obscure.

St. Peter expressly tells us, that there are some things in St. Paul's epistles "hard to be understood," and that many persons "wrested them to their own destruction." Here we have the express authority of an Apostle for maintaining, not merely that revelation *may* be obscure, but that, in some places, it actually *is* so:—an authority subversive at once of the argument of those who infer, that a revelation is intelligible to the meanest capacity, because it comes from God. We learn, also, and it is an awful lesson, that these passages of Paul were wrested to the destruction of the "*unlearned and unstable.*" The latter being men of no steady principles of religion or morality, and yielding, of course, to every vicious impulse, were seduced, by the sophistry

of the passions, into a misapprehension of the meaning of the Apostle, which patient investigation, with a sincere desire of religious improvement, might have enabled them to comprehend. The *unlearned*, unable to penetrate through the difficulties of the text, to the Apostle's meaning, and yet determined to make the attempt, tortured his words into wild nonsense, or sense more impious. Forgetting that no suitable education, no previous habits of intellectual exercise, had prepared their minds for serious study, they presumed to rely on their own private judgment, and thus wrested, not only these passages of Paul, but "ALSO THE OTHER SCRIPTURES to their own destruction." Yet these men, who thus perverted the sense of St. Paul, and that of the *other* inspired writers, were the contemporaries of the Apostles, and spoke the language of the New Testament and Septuagint version. Asiatics themselves, they were familiar with oriental idioms, oriental images, with the figurative style, and bold amplifications of the eastern nations. And shall it be said, that illiterate peasants, distant two thousand miles from the country, and nearly two thousand years from the age of the Apostles, will not grossly pervert the meaning of the Sacred Oracles, though reading them without oral or written explanation through the medium of an English version, of two hundred years standing, scrupulously literal, and therefore retaining all the difficulties of the original, and superadding others ?

SECTION VI.

Enthusiasm is a hardy plant, the growth of every age and climate. Every form of religion, Pagan, Mahometan, and Christian, has its enthusiasts, who have been uniformly held in veneration by the ignorant and weak, and pitied or despised by the wise, the learned, and the truly pious. Perhaps it is not wonderful that they should find their way into the bosom of the Established Church, and even into many of its pulpits. Of all the members of the Establishment they are the loudest for the circulation of the Scriptures among the multitude "without note or comment." This is very natural. Persuaded that human reason and learning can never succeed, in unfolding the meaning of the Sacred Oracles, they rely on supernatural agency alone for understanding Scriptural truths. In their judgment, reason is a blind guide, and learning, instead of smoothing the way, perplexes and obstructs the progress of the "serious Christian." In the apprehension of these gentlemen, therefore, all that is wanting, for understanding the Scriptures, is a competent portion of self-abasement and ignorance, on the part of a man, with a Bible to read; God will do the rest.

Those who agree with these *modern puritans* in this opinion, are right in expecting the happiest effects from the circulation of the Scriptures among the lower orders. The majority, however, of the members of the establishment, will, it is hoped, still continue to think, with the greatest luminaries of our

church and nation, that reason, improved reason—is the only interpreter of the Sacred Writings. Man has been sentenced by his Creator to a life of toil and drudgery, and the sentence extends to his mind as well as to his body. He must cultivate the ground for his corporeal—the mind for his intellectual food. His proficiency in every science is proportioned to the skill of his instructor, the time, toil, and talents expended in the study of it. In literature and the arts it is the same. In every trade, occupation, and profession, manual dexterity, or intellectual excellence, can be acquired only by previous discipline and long habits of bodily or mental action. But are deep study, patient investigation, and the vigorous exercise of reason necessary to the attainment of all human knowledge; and will the knowledge of ourselves, as fallen creatures, as moral and responsible agents,—will the knowledge of God, of his attributes, of his will, of the doctrines he inculcates, of the duties he prescribes, of his precepts, promises, exhortations, denunciations, and of his *whole scheme of redemption*,—will all this knowledge—deep, various, and sublime as it is—be extracted from the Bible by ignorant rustics and mechanics, unassisted by oral or written elucidation? It would be highly desirable, that the peasantry of Ireland understood and respected the laws of their country more than they do at present; yet no society has yet started up, with the avowed object of dispersing among them cheap editions of Blackstone, or Coke Littleton, “without note or comment.” A competent knowledge of natural philosophy, astronomy, metaphysics, and political economy, could not fail to hu-

manize their minds, lessen their taste for nocturnal depredations, and quench their thirst for blood; yet no sagacious reformer has yet come forward with a proposal for circulating among them, Newton, Laplace, Locke, Smith, or Stewart, "without note or comment." Why? because these books would not be read, or read to some useless, or pernicious purpose.

This applies, with infinitely greater force to the Bible; for, as it is the best of all books, its perversion is proportionably dangerous. Beware, then, how you entrust the Bible indiscriminately to the multitude, and then abandon them to the licentious glosses of their own wild imaginations. The Bible, being the great receptacle of Divine knowledge, is difficult in proportion to its importance. This is wisely ordained, and strictly analogous to the general dispensations of Providence. Labour is the lot of man; it is the price we pay for every temporal good—for those objects necessary for the comfort and well-being of our bodies, and for our most valuable intellectual acquisitions. And why should it be presumed, that the knowledge of things Divine must be of easy attainment?

The obscurity of the Bible answers many good purposes; it affords the noblest exercise for our improved reason: as the study of it is obligatory on all, who have sufficient leisure, capacity, and literature, the diligence or remissness of those who are qualified to peruse it are put to the test. Occasion is given for the exercise of many of our best virtues: our patience, our perseverance, our unremitting attention, our reliance on the Divine aid are exerted in overcoming the diffi-

culties of Scripture, as well as in surmounting the various other obstacles which obstruct our march to Christian perfection, in this our state of probation and moral discipline. Human learning derives its greatest value from its powerful subserviency to the elucidation of the Sacred Writings; but where there is little obscurity, there is little room for elucidation. Besides, it is the nature of man to disregard what is of easy attainment; he considers it comparatively worthless; but highly prizes that which is the fruit of patient toil, or persevering research.

Thus one great cause of the difficulties of Scripture is found in our very constitution. They also bring into action an important class of our relative duties—the zeal and prudence of the learned and wealthy in communicating religious knowledge, and the docility of the poor and ignorant in receiving it. As the latter want time and capacity for a profitable perusal of the Scriptures; while, by their labour, the former are enabled to live in opulence and leisure, favourable to mental cultivation, it becomes the bounden duty of the one class to convey Scriptural instruction to the other, in a *form suited to their capacities*, and of the latter to receive it with humble gratitude, and treasure it up in their hearts.

To instruct the ignorant is the precept of Christ, and is certainly more difficult than to put Bibles or Testaments into their hands. It is, however, the duty of the higher classes, and they ought not to flinch from it. The peasantry are capable of religious improvement to an high degree, if proper means be employed. Oral instruction should be

used to a considerable extent, in teaching them Christianity. They should be taught to read and understand plain English with tolerable ease: then oral instruction should be aided by summary views of the doctrines of our religion, plainly written, clearly arranged and extracted from the Scriptures by men of sound heads and honest hearts. Interesting narratives, grounded on scripture history, written with clearness and elegance, and leading to some useful moral, or illustrating some important doctrine, should be put into their hands. Well-written fables might be made the vehicles of pure morality and fervent piety. Select extracts from the Scriptures themselves, with short explanatory notes, and an occasional paraphrase, may be judiciously introduced into the poor man's library. To these should be added new editions of the Book of Common Prayer, with a commentary annexed to each gospel, epistle and psalm. These works, for obvious reasons, should not want the inferior advantages of good paper, a good type, and well-executed prints; and the leaven of Calvinism ought to be excluded with scrupulous care. With such treatises the lower class of Protestants should be regularly supplied. As to the Catholics, any such attempt is perhaps premature.

SECTION VII.

But still it will be said, that this is to set up authority in opposition to private judgment—the great principle of the Reformation. But, by the plan proposed, you do not endeavour to extinguish or overawe the private judg-

ment of the peasant, but to awaken his torpid mind into action, by furnishing him with materials, on which his feeble faculties can work. You lay before him, it is true, your own views of Christian truth, honestly and conscientiously extracted from the Scriptures for his use ; you invite him, as he values his highest interests, “ to read, learn,” and act upon them ; but you leave him at full liberty to receive or reject them, in the whole or in part. You do not extort his assent to your doctrines by whipping, fine, imprisonment, or pillory. You do not press them on his belief by star-chambers or inquisitions. You do not erect yourself into an infallible judge, in matters of faith ; and hence infer, that authoritative dictation is your right, and implicit belief his duty. You leave him to the exercise of his judgment, such as it is, and look forward with a hope of seeing that judgment gradually improved, till at last it may perhaps be profitably employed on the Bible itself.

Surely, then, it is a gross abuse of words to say, that there is in this any undue influence, any attempt to subdue or stifle private judgment, and set up authority. You leave him at full liberty to reject or adopt the doctrines of your religious tracts : therefore his adoption or rejection of them is an act of his own judgment. You do not threaten, you do not terrify, you do not constrain ; in fact, you do not exert, or even claim any authority at all. The Church of Rome, resting on its infallibility, claimed a right to interpret the Scriptures, not only for the whole body of the laity, but for the Clergy themselves individually. This was and ought to be resisted. To admit it, would be to

sacrifice the sacred and unalienable rights of reason and conscience.

Of every man *duly qualified* for the study of the Scriptures, it is at once the right and the duty to derive the doctrines of Christianity immediately from that source : nor, perhaps, ought the perusal of them to be interdicted to any person whatever, however ignorant. A tribunal appointed for enforcing the interdiction would be liable to constant error, in deciding on points so nice as the capacity or incapacity of individuals, and its tyranny would soon become a greater evil than that which it was intended to remedy : besides, it is harsh in the extreme to say to a poor man, you shall not read the Bible, however desirous you may be to do so. But there is a striking difference between not allowing him to read the Bible, and not giving him the Bible to read ; between taking it from him, and putting it into his hands. The plain practical rule is,—neither give him the Bible, nor take it from him ; but give him such works as are above described : if he has the Bible, they may guard him against the wild licentiousness of interpretation : if he has not, they may make him a meek and peaceable Christian, instead of a turbulent and dangerous enthusiast. Trust not to his own reason, to his private judgment ; he has none ; or, which is sufficient for my argument, he has not enough : and therefore the Bible should not be industriously put into his hands, because it is too obscure for his rude understanding.

This is the conclusion, to which we are equally hurried, whether we consider the antiquity of the Sacred Writings ; their figurative language ; their ori-

ental idioms; their highly-diversified style; their subject matter; the important ends answered by their obscurity; the analogy of the Divine dispensations; the numerous sects into which Christians have been rent; the torrents of fanaticism which have swept away civil and religious establishments—while all these sects, and all these fanatics, appeal to Scripture for a vindication of their opinions, and a justification of their atrocities.

SECTION VIII.

But this argument, it will be said, proves too much; for it goes to shew, that the Bible is unfit for the perusal of the learned as well as the illiterate; because the former as well as the latter have misunderstood and perverted it. That men of cultivated minds have sometimes mistaken the sense of particular passages of Scripture is admitted; but, this only furnishes an additional fact against those who maintain, that it is easily understood. It is also admitted, that the wise and the learned have, in some instances, wilfully perverted the sense of the Sacred Writings. This again exemplifies only the perverseness of men blinded by their passions, and determined to support a commodious, or favourite hypothesis. But from neither admission does it follow, that the well-informed ought to be discouraged from studying the Scriptures; for this would be to maintain that men, *qualified* for its profitable perusal, ought to be discouraged from *using* the Bible, lest they might *abuse* it. The blessing of a good education, by creating in them a capacity of pro-

fitably reading the Scriptures, has imposed an obligation to read them : but to the peasant, as the blessing has been denied, the obligation does not extend. He cannot *use*—he must *abuse* the Scriptures. His duty then is not to read the Bible, for which he is unqualified ; but to derive his religious information from more accessible sources. This seems to be the natural order of things, and no rash attempt should be made to reverse it.

The bulk of mankind must be content to glean up their information from others ; they cannot approach the great sources of knowledge ; they must receive the most important truths at second hand—on the authority of those, who derive them more immediately from the fountain head. The practical truths of medicine, law, morality, physics, and mathematics, though of constant application and indispensable necessity, are confidently acted upon, every day, by a vast majority of our fellow-creatures, of whose own researches into the depths of these sciences they are by no means the result ; but adopted on the authority of men, who have devoted their time and talents to the cultivation of these various departments of knowledge. With respect to Christian knowledge, the same process has in general been observed ; and where it has been departed from, in any considerable degree, society has been shaken to its centre.

SECTION IX.

But the principle, which is always at work in counteracting the progressive improvement of the human species, is—the frailty of man in forgetting the lessons of

past experience. After one or two generations pass away, a curtain is dropped, which hides from our view the follies and sufferings of our ancestors. The causes or occasions of these sufferings are no longer remembered, or they are supposed to be divested by time of their malignant nature. The fanatical extravagance, indeed, which deluged England with blood in the 17th century, was too well remembered for some years after the restoration, when men, emulous to express their abhorrence of the dreadful perversions of Christianity, rushed with desperate blindness into the opposite extreme of rank infidelity, and bare-faced profligacy. But now, after the lapse of more than a century, that religious extravagance, with all its horrors, and the subsequent infidelity, which sprang from its root, are almost forgotten; and men even labour to persuade themselves, in opposition to the fullest and clearest evidence of history, that these enormities were unconnected with the abuse and perversion of the Sacred Writings.

Hence the hopeful project, pompously avowed, of placing "the Bible, without note or comment," in the hands of every wretched cottager. The pure text itself, unincumbered with human, and consequently fallible glosses, is to be spread out before him; he is to be resigned to his own unclouded sagacity and unperverted judgment; every thing earthly, which could mislead that sagacity, or bias that judgment, is to be scrupulously excluded; till his mind, fraught with genuine Biblical knowledge and pure theology, condescends to return to the ordinary occupations of an Irish peasant. What a delightful prospect does this hold out

to the "gospel preachers," who have imported into the pulpits of the Established Church the charitable doctrines of the School of Geneva? Ireland now, alas! the land of sinners and transgressors, resuming her long lost pre-eminence, will again be hailed as the island of saints! Her fields will be cultivated by ragged, but profound divines: while the refined workings of the Spirit, and clumsy operations of agriculture, relieve each other in edifying succession.

SECTION X.

But, leaving the "gospel preachers" to the enjoyment of these bright visions, may I be permitted to ask the other Clergymen of the Established Church, who are members of the Bible Society, and in habits of reasoning, whether they have considered a certain consequence, to which their favourite opinion directly leads? If the reading of the Bible be able to produce those happy effects on the peasantry, so confidently anticipated or presumed in every page of the Society's reports;—if the Bible alone, "without note or comment," is to convert the unbelieving, to reclaim the profligate, to enlighten the ignorant; if its perusal is so eminently calculated to chase away superstition, and error, and vice, from the minds of the lower orders, and to propagate the unadulterated doctrine and pure morality of the gospel; will not men begin to conclude, that, after "the Bible is made the inmate of every house and cottage," the necessity of retaining a Religious Establishment, or even a Clerical order, will cease to exist? If every man has a Bible, if he

can read and understand it ; and which cannot be questioned, if the Bible, so read and understood, can “ make him wise unto salvation,” it inevitably follows, that the Clergy are not an essential part of a religious community. Some may contend, for a while, that though not necessary, yet they are to a certain degree useful or ornamental ; but, in the progress of investigation, it would soon be discovered, that Prayers may be read, and Sacraments administered without them, and that the Bible is an excellent substitute for the sermons of modern doctors. Nor would it fail to occur to the new reformers, that the property of the church, if secularized, and placed at the disposal of his majesty’s ministers, would form an important item in the ways and means for the current year, and enable the chancellor of the exchequer to move for a repeal of some of the most oppressive taxes. The Clergy, it would be said, are public functionaries ; but when their functions become useless, those, who no longer profit by their instruction, should not be burthened with their support.

All this, and more, would be said, and a better reasoner than an “ evangelical minister” would be sorely puzzled, if called upon for a full and fair refutation of these irreverent doctrines, on the principles of the Bible Society. In truth, it is principally because the Scriptures are very voluminous, and very difficult, that a necessity arose of instituting a distinct order of men, prepared by long discipline and severe study for the important duty of collecting, exhibiting, expounding and illustrating the doctrines and precepts of the Sacred Writings. But let the public be once convinced, that

tinkers and dray-men are qualified to search the Scriptures, to overcome their difficulties and comprehend their doctrines, and all respect for the Clerical order is that moment at an end. They will be considered an excrescence of society, which ought to be lopped off. In point of fact, accordingly we find that the more enthusiastic sects either have no spiritual teachers at all, or none regularly educated for the ministry. The Scriptures, they conceive, have no difficulties for *them*; *they* do not stand in need of human interpreters; *they* derive their knowledge from an higher and purer source than any earthly teacher. Nay, some enthusiasts, soaring above their fellows, or rather, arguing more correctly, have rejected the Bible itself as unnecessary to men favoured with immediate revelation.

Let it be particularly observed, that those enthusiastic sects, now so rapidly multiplying in various parts of the United Kingdom, and still more in America, are in general illiterate peasants and mechanics, who can barely read and write;—that they have the Bible, and particularly its *obscurest parts*, almost entirely by rote—and have as great an antipathy to “notes and comments” on the Sacred Text as any Bible Society. Surely then it may be prudent to consider, whether the operations of these societies are more calculated to swell the number of those rapturous and enlightened worshippers, or to fill the churches of the Establishment with sober and pious Christians. To me it appears, that their immediate tendency is to empty the churches and fill the conventicles; and their remote tendency, to put down the former altogether.

SECTION XI.

But the wildest visionaries are by no means the most dangerous. There is little ground of alarm in the progress and practice of the peaceable quaker, the self-denying shaker, or the harmless dunker. The fanaticism of these sects is tempered with some ingredients, which render it almost innocuous. But beware of the active, serious, plodding, proselyting enthusiasts, whose number, already formidable, is annually augmented, by thousands of converts from the Established Church, with which, however, they still maintain some loose connexion, or hollow alliance, which disguises their hostility, or covers their approaches. Of these, however, the Calvinistic branch is infinitely the more dangerous: both are strenuous advocates for making "the Bible an inmate of every cottage" in the United Kingdom. With what view? Not, certainly, with a view of making converts from Methodism to the established religion; but with that of making the peasantry of the Establishment good Christians, i. e. staunch methodists.

As to the Roman Catholic peasantry, they know them too well to expect any converts from that quarter. To them they have a thousand times read the Bible, on foot and on horseback, and preached and prayed, and groaned without effect. What, therefore, their own spiritual labours, aided by the Bible, failed to effect, they despair of being produced by the Bible alone: or, through a special interference of Providence, should a Catholic peasant be converted, by a Protestant Bible, they

know that the new convert, unless stopped by a fresh miracle, would join the communion of the enemy, not of the friend of tithes—of the methodist preacher—not of the parson of the parish. Full well, also, they know the peasantry of the Established Church. They have accurately studied human nature as exhibited in low life. They know, accordingly, much better than the lords spiritual and temporal of the Bible Society, what use the poor Protestant will make of his Bible—that he will *dwell but little on the easier parts, and much on the more obscure*,—that his taste will lead him to the prophetic books, the Revelation of St. John, the Epistles of St. Paul, and all the most abstruse passages,—that his understanding will be overpowered, and his fancy kindled,—that imagination, uncontrolled by reason, will exert all her creative powers,—that for him inspiration will draw the curtain, which hides from this world all the secrets of the next,—and, while in this blissful state, that he will hurry off to the next congregation of inspired Christians, and animate their jaded devotion with his new-born raptures.

SECTION XII.

That every man is too prone to overrate his own capacity is an acknowledged truth. For this infirmity no human remedy can perhaps be found, but in a philosophy, at once profound and humble; of which the narrow limits of the human mind, and its constant liability to error, even within these limits, is perhaps the last as well as the most humiliating lesson. Accordingly, this

principle of our nature is most vigorous in uncultivated minds, which, unused to discussion, encounter few difficulties, and therefore suppose there are few difficulties to encounter.

We trace its incessant operation in the whole conduct of the lower classes. We find it in their astonishing credulity; in their no less astonishing incredulity: in their slow reception of the most useful improvements submitted for years to their observation; and in every action of their lives, however absurd. They believe the grossest falsehood, because they think themselves competent judges of the *strength* of the evidence: they disbelieve the clearest truth, because they are judges equally competent of its *weakness*; and they reject the improvement, because they sometimes rely on their sagacity and judgment, even more than on their senses. The overweening confidence in their own judgment is a fruitful source of error, and a serious obstacle to the improvement of their condition: yet this dangerous delusion is evidently encouraged and cherished by the mistaken policy of the Bible Society.

How agreeably must the self-love of the poor man be flattered by the opinion of that respectable body pronouncing him qualified for the study of the Sacred Oracles, "without note or comment?" The homage, thus paid to his understanding, is enough to turn his head, even without the aid of his Biblical lucubrations,—before his gross blunders and wild interpretations of the Sacred Text produce their natural effect on his bewildered mind. Certain it is, that this

principle of self-confidence, uncontrolled by education, exposes the peasant, who scarcely suspects its existence, to the tyranny of every favourite passion and prejudice; predisposes him to receive, as indisputable truths, all the illusions of his own imagination, merely because they are his own; and, combined with his ignorance, produces in him that frame of mind, which is, of all others, the most unfit for the perusal of the Scriptures. To put the Bible into the hands of such a man, is to “cast pearls before swine;”—to put a sword of high price into the hands of a lunatic;—to convert the gracious means of salvation into an engine of destruction! The gross familiarity of blind ignorance with revealed wisdom, is to be seriously deprecated.

SECTION XIII.

The truth is, the Bible is already too much read by Protestant peasants, and too much neglected by Protestant gentlemen. Among the latter accordingly we find, that honour is too frequently substituted for morality, etiquette for religion, gaming for reflection, and gallantry for devotion! The sportsman’s calendar is read; the novel devoured; the play admired; the Bible merely tolerated! Thus religious ignorance, which should only be found among the beasts that perish, rises in spite of the grossness of its nature into the highest regions of rank and fashion, from which it sheds its blighting influence on all the subordinate classes.

What a perverse and inconsistent being is man!

Those who can understand the Bible seldom read it, and content themselves with recommending it to those who cannot; while those, to whom it is recommended, often read it with avidity, seldom understand it, and generally pervert it to their own destruction! How have the spiritual and temporal interests of men, how has the cause of Heaven and earth been injured, by the religious apathy of the opulent and learned! This apathy is the first stage in the road to infidelity. The human mind seldom rests in a posture of indifference: it soon presses forward to a state more animated; and that, which at first was mere disregard of the word of God, soon becomes determined hostility. Corruption of principle, and profligacy of manners, rapidly succeed, and are imperfectly concealed from vulgar eyes by the artificial veil of refinement. The contagion descends from the peer to the commoner, and is propagated, through all the middle classes, till it reach the meanest peasant, who, unable to purchase the refinements of vice, contentedly wallows in all its grossness.

Hence the various forms of wretchedness, which scourge a profligate peasantry, and deform the face of society: for much of this moral and physical evil the higher orders are responsible. Their relaxed morality is the chief source of the disease. The vicious example of the great and mighty of the land acts, with irresistible force, on the mean and ignorant: but let the higher ranks employ their cultivated minds and ample leisure in studying the Scriptures—let *rational* religion become the appendage of exalted rank—let genuine piety cast its mild lustre over worldly grandeur

—let the opulent and learned strive with each other in the purity of their morals, and the extent of their beneficence, more than in splendour of equipage, force of eloquence, or extent of erudition; and more will be done in ten years for the moral, religious, and temporal improvement of the lower classes, than can be effected in a century by the labours of the Bible Society. The lessons of example are intelligible to the meanest capacity. To the uneducated mind precept is not always clear; and, when it is, its influence is too frequently feeble; because, perhaps, it savours somewhat of dictation. Precept, however, and example united, when both are good, seldom fail to produce the happiest effects, provided the former be clear, and the latter illustrious.

The sum and substance of religion judiciously extracted from the sacred Scriptures, with due attention to clearness and arrangement, and circulated, among the common people, at the expense of a really pious and virtuous nobility and gentry, would enlighten their minds with true knowledge, and effect that change, in their moral conduct, which all good men so earnestly desire. The doctrines and precepts of Christianity, exemplified in the lives of the higher orders, and *adapted to the comprehension* of the lower, would rekindle the religious principle, where they might find it extinguished: cherish it, where still alive; and prevent it from sinking into superstition, or blazing into enthusiasm. But were the Bible as easy as it is difficult, still it would be a work of charity to condense its doctrines into a short and well-arranged system, and spare the bewildered peasant the labour of pushing his re-

searches through so vast a volume, and such multifarious matter, for the purpose of collecting and arranging for himself. It is cruel to set him adrift, in his own little bark, on the immense ocean of Revelation, without star or compass to guide him. Yet this is, in other words, the avowed object of the Bible Societies. An educated man, unacquainted with revelation, may obtain a clearer view of the whole Christian scheme, from a small duodecimo volume, read in a few hours, than he can from the Bible in as many months. This holds incomparably stronger, with respect to the uneducated peasant : from such a work he would derive more religious knowledge in a few days, than he could from the Bible during his whole life.

SECTION XIV.

That the Bible is adapted to the meanest understanding—an opinion taken up at first, without due examination—is still retained, because men are disinclined to submit, to a severe scrutiny, the truth of an opinion long and fondly cherished. We think it harsh to be called upon to renounce opinions, for which our ancestors had once strenuously contended. If their opinions be right, we maintain them because they are so ; if wrong, we vindicate them still, on a principle of honour. Perhaps the spirit of opposition to papal Rome still operates in some degree. But surely, if the popes and cardinals of the 16th century contended that *no* layman, however *wise or learned*, should be *allowed* to read the Scriptures, that is no reason why the Protestants of the 19th century should

insist that *every* layman, however *stupid or ignorant*, should be *invited* to read “the Bible, without note or comment.” Looking for truth between these extremes, both equally senseless, the modern Protestant ought to declare, that all who are capable of understanding it, and no other, are in duty bound to read it; but at the same time, that its perusal should, in no case, be interdicted.

SECTION XV.

Every established church must, in the nature of things, be an object of jealousy or dislike to those who dissent from it. Men hate to be periodically called upon for a portion of their property, for the support of a system of doctrine and discipline, of which they disapprove, and from which they are unconscious of deriving any benefit. From an establishment, therefore, as from an incumbrance, they wish to be relieved; and would set up their own system in its place, or have no establishment at all. This is quite natural; and, to censure a dissenter for it, is just as reasonable as to blame him for being a man. It is, however, sufficient to justify some suspicion and vigilance on the part of the Establishment. When, therefore, we behold a great association, comprehending, not only members of the church, but dissenters of every denomination, acting together, in close union, for years, in promoting a certain specific object, and that of a religious nature, such an extraordinary moral phenomenon not only excites our curiosity, but suggests the policy of investigating the probable consequences, to the Church Establishment, of such an unnatural union.

Let us attend to the facts of the case. The dissenters, if the British and Foreign Bible Society did not originate with them, were foremost, or among the foremost, to press forward with their subscriptions and contributions. Including the Calvinists within the pale of the Establishment, who are, substantially, though not nominally dissenters, they are the most active members of the institution, and forward its views with an alacrity and zeal; which cast into the shade the more slow and measured proceedings of their brethren. The "evangelical ministers" particularly, are indefatigable.

With an obliging frankness they tender their services as secretaries to the different Bible Societies; and never forget to inform the public, that these services are gratuitous. With an ardour, which neither sickness can obstruct, nor business damp, they make long journies, they organize affiliated branches, and Bible associations; before the former of which they make long speeches in Scripture phrase, and before some of the latter, often consisting of females, they read awful narratives of providential interferences, of sudden conversions wrought on low profligates by short passages of scripture, together with *well-written* letters of thanks from *convicts* under sailing orders to Botany Bay, acknowledging the receipt of Bibles and Testaments, and imploring blessings on Bible Societies. For the parent society, and her numerous progeny, they draw up edifying reports, in which a piercing eye can occasionally discover the half-obliterated track of Calvinism. In gaining new members for the parent association, or its auxiliary branches, their efforts

are unremitting. Though repeatedly repulsed, they still return to the charge; and it is scarcely safe for any man, in the middle rank of life, to refuse his name and subscription. He is plied with verbal and written applications, exhortations, invitations to attend Bible society meetings; and if these fail, with Bible society reports, politely and gratuitously sent for his perusal. If he still holds out, his character is gradually and delicately whispered away; and he soon finds himself regarded, by many of his neighbours, as "one of your mere moral men,—an enemy to the Bible and vital religion." Indeed, it is not uncommon to hear it asserted, from the pulpit, by a "gospel preacher," that no friend to Christianity would withhold his mite from an institution, whose object is the general "diffusion of the word of God;" and this unwarrantable and ungenerous sophism is echoed in the reports of the Bible Society.

To elicit, from the poor, part of their hard-earned pittance, penny-a-week societies have been instituted; and so well has the project succeeded, that the parent association boasts, in its reports, that these miserable confederacies are frequently more productive than the auxiliary branches in the same districts. These penny-a-week contributions are likely to be considered, in a short time, as infallible passports to Heaven, among the lower class of Protestants, as indulgences were, formerly, among the Roman Catholics. Be this as it may, these numerous associations give the Calvinistic ministers opportunities, eagerly seized, of mingling every where with the mass of the Protestant population, which they impress with a convic-

tion of their own extraordinary piety, by manifestations of superior zeal in circulating the Scriptures. These public meetings lead to closer intimacy in private, and the influence, thus acquired over men's minds, is daily confirmed and extended by the most dexterous management.

To the "blessed labours of the gospel ministers," accordingly, the lower class of Protestants almost universally ascribe "the great regeneration" which, they are taught to believe, is about to take place in the world. Without them the Bible Society, it is affirmed, would either not exist, or its operations be languid and ill-directed; they are the main spring which gives motion and effect to the whole machine.—The Bishops, the Deans, and the Lords, it is whispered, would long continue to slumber on their couches, regardless of the spiritual wants of the poor, had not the "gospel ministers of God" roused them into activity, and shamed them into co-operation: nor is this language confined to the lower class. The sentiments it expresses find numerous advocates among the more respectable Protestants, and are rapidly extending to the whole body.

Accordingly, their habitual respect for the dignitaries of the Church, the universities, and those illustrious divines, whose names, some years ago, had never been mentioned but with feelings of national pride and veneration, is notoriously declining. The works of Bishop Tillotson, and Doctor Samuel Clarke, are now treated as waste paper, in families where they have been read, and admired, for successive generations; and the rambling effusions of "evangelical ministers" have superseded these impe-

ishable monuments of departed worth, rational piety, and exalted genius. Indeed, "gospel preaching," "gospel preachers," Bible Societies, and the wonders which Bibles, "without note or comment," are producing, or about to produce, at home and abroad, are becoming the favourite topics of conversation. Every post is expected to bring accounts of the conversion of the "King of Persia," the "Mufti of the Tartars," and (but I must give this gentleman all his titles) of "his *lowliness* Cyril, Bishop of Constantinople, of new Rome, and œcumenical Patriarch." His lowliness and the mufti, we are exultingly told, are already members of the Petersburg Bible Society. The Emperor of Russia, it is devoutly hoped, is already a "saint;" as the transition to Calvinism, from the characteristic piety of his grandmother, which he inherits in so eminent a degree, is short and smooth. Daily also is looked for the "conversion" of some of "the self-righteous bishops, and dignitaries of the Church," and wonder is expressed why they have not already discovered more unequivocal symptoms of regeneration.

The opinions and conduct of the anti-Calvinistic clergy, from the Primate to the Curate, are freely canvassed, and held out, in disadvantageous contrast with "the pure precepts and humble walk" of the "gospel ministers." The object of the former is "filthy lucre;" that of the latter "the conversion of souls." The former have "intruded into the vineyard to consume its fruits;" the latter have been "sent to do the work of its Lord." The labours of the one are "labours of love"—"to reclaim the perishing sinner,—to pluck the

fire-brand from the fire ;” those of the others are labours “of selfishness, of worldly-mindedness, of that charity which begins at home, and also ends there!”

SECTION XVI.

This is not a fancied representation : it is drawn from real life, the result of personal observation and of the best information. It is a faithful sketch of what is passing around us,—a true copy of that mighty change, which the sentiments of men are undergoing, and which must fill with alarm the friends of our religious and social system. The danger, indeed, is not yet fully developed ; but it is not, therefore, the less real. It has not yet started up in full maturity and gigantic stature, brandishing its hundred arms, denouncing the hierarchy as anti-christian, and the monarchy as anti-social ; but its growth is rapid ; it is daily receiving vast augmentations of strength ; it is laying its plans, collecting its energies, estimating its means, and forming its calculations.

The Church is already in a state of blockade ; the Arminian and Calvinistic methodists have thrown their lines of circumvallation about her ; numerous desertions are daily taking place, and treachery is busy in the heart of the garrison. *There* the intern Calvinists, with the “gospel ministers” at their head, have taken their station. It is against these men, their cunning, their dexterity, their professions of attachment, their plausible exterior, their unceasing activity, and masterly organization, that the vigilance of the Established Church should be principally directed. They have already got

possession of many of our pulpits ; and wherever they obtain a footing, teach the people to despise the received explanations of the church catechism, the best commentators on Scripture, the sermons of our ablest divines ; and exhort them to read no book whatever, except their own religious tracts, and “ the Bible, without note or comment.” Against human learning they are perpetually exclaiming as the worst species of ignorance, and the greatest obstacle to religious knowledge. Rejecting the Articles of the Church, as explained by her own divines, understood by her constituted authorities, and by her general congregation, they affix to them their own interpretation, and call *themselves*, exclusively, the Established Church.

Accordingly, they consider the great body of the clergy, nobility, and gentry of the United Kingdom, as downright heathens ; talk of them, quite familiarly, as “ outcasts and aliens from the commonwealth of Israel ;” and, in the “ private assemblies of the faithful,” pray for their conversion with the *bitterest* devotion. Arrogating to themselves every venerable epithet, which can give authority to intrusion, or the appearance of sanctity to religious extravagance, they style themselves “ evangelical ministers, gospel preachers, servants of Jehovah, sons of God.” By frequent conferences, or, when these are impracticable, by a regular epistolary correspondence, they preserve an unity of sentiment and conduct. Hence, though scattered over every part of the empire, and indeed of the world, their movements are always simultaneous, systematical, and uniform.

To one great leader they seem to be under strict subordination. Regularly organized, each member performs the part assigned him, he advances or retreats, he masks his movements, or ostentatiously displays them. As an important part of their discipline, they learn to disguise their sentiments, to soften down an obnoxious doctrine, to deny it in part, to adjure it in the whole, and afterwards to re-assert it, as time and place require. The opinion of the Bishop they adopt, in his presence, with seeming cheerfulness, and reject, in his absence, with unfeigned abhorrence. Doctrines which may startle the meek and gentle convert, they carefully suppress; and, to the chosen few, alone, are revealed the higher mysteries of Calvinism.

In the pulpit they are incessantly descanting on the persecution, which, from the beginning of the world, the "children of God" have suffered in various shapes from the "children of the devil," and "continue to endure at the present day, and *in the very country we live in.*" In the pulpit, also, nothing is so much the object of a sneer as "your moral man," whom they pronounce "to be as odious in the sight of God as the murderer or the adulterer." With them every man who is not a Calvinist, is "an enemy to the Saviour," his religion is "outward shew," and his morality "self-righteousness." Abandoned to this "self-righteousness, to lip service, and pharisaical pride," he is an abomination in the sight of Him, who came to save the chief of sinners,—"*the open and undisguised profligate.*"

To Prelacy and Prelates they harbour a rooted aversion, which they seldom fail to impart to their cou-

verts; and, by holy invective against their Diocesan in private, they atone for the homage, which, with apparent cheerfulness, and real horror, they pay him in public. In this picture the writer is not conscious of overcharging a single feature: he does not flatter; but neither does he distort: and for its justness he appeals to every candid man, who has attentively examined the original.

SECTION XVII.

Is it then wonderful, that these aspiring priests—with their glowing enthusiasm, their unwearied zeal, their saint-like pretensions, and their experienced subtlety—suffered for years to practice without control on public credulity and religious feeling,—should have succeeded in infusing into so many breasts the stern spirit of Calvinism? Is it surprising that their principles, so calculated to overawe the understanding, to flatter the spiritual pride of man, to gratify his impatience of subordination to lawful authority, and to indulge his worst passions in hating his “unconverted” neighbours—should spread with a rapidity, which baffles calculation, through the Protestant community, and, if their progress be not speedily arrested, continue to spread till the whole mass of mind be infected?

The time then is come, when all who are persuaded that the Bible is not a system of Methodism, or Calvinism, should join with heart and hand to resist the spreading mischief. The progress of the evil is directly and indirectly assisted by the operations of the Bible Society. The natural effect on the

uncultivated mind, of reading "the Bible without note or comment," oral or written, is enthusiasm more or less sublimated, according to the temperament of the individual. Religious ideas and doctrines presented to the understanding, without explanation, through the gross medium of ignorance, are obscure and indistinct: but by those very qualities, added to their highly interesting and awful import, they astonish and confound the mind, stimulate the imagination to its wildest flights, and overpower the reasoning faculty, which becomes altogether passive, or lends itself to give consistency to delusion, and some appearance of regularity to the chaotic mass of loose feelings, unreal images, and wild conceptions.

Within is felt an unusual heaving, a swell of soul, a vast expansion of spirit; till the whole man is engrossed, mastered, impelled by sublime absurdity and towering frenzy. He has now lost all relish for that sound form of doctrine which he had learned from the received exposition of the church catechism, and imbibed from his old religious instructors. His vitiated taste rejects all spiritual nourishment, except fanatical dogmatism highly seasoned. His next neighbour, lately converted to Calvinism, finds him in this mood, convinces him in a few minutes of "the corruptions of the church," and introduces him to the next "gospel minister," by whom his conversion is radically effected by a short conversation and a long sermon. These events, though of daily occurrence in common life, are perhaps not discernible at that giddy elevation, from which Peers and Prelates survey the movements of inferior mortals.

SECTION XVIII.

Nor is it only by giving the Bible to the ignorant, by encouraging them to read it “without note or comment,” and rely on their own wretched understandings, that the mischief is done, and the interest of the Church betrayed. The whole spirit of the Bible Society’s operations, and the language, which they allow themselves and their advocates to use, are calculated to throw discredit and contempt on the labours of our most learned divines, in elucidating the Inspired Writings. If the Sacred Oracles, without note or comment, be intelligible to illiterate peasants—the commentaries, keys, expositions, paraphrases, and sermons, of our eminent expounders of scripture, can be of little use to them, and of still less to the educated readers of the Bible.

The works of Locke, Taylor, Whitby, Patrick, Louth, and of hundreds besides, who employed all the energies of their powerful minds in elucidating the Scriptures of truth, must be laid aside, as little better than obstacles in the way of the “serious” biblical student. This sentence of proscription must extend to the whole body of English divinity, comprehending the literary remains of those highly-gifted individuals, whose works we vainly hoped would perish only with the earth itself. The Bible Society, in their speeches and reports, are perpetually taking credit to themselves for circulating the Scriptures, in their “*naked simplicity*”—for diffusing “*the pure and unadulterated word of God*”—for placing in the hands of every indi-

vidual “ the sacred text, unmixed with the doctrines of men,” and for endeavouring to render the institution “ more acceptable to those, who are unwilling to exchange the prophets, evangelists, and apostles, for modern theologues, and who will not submit to take their faith upon trust, and to believe by proxy.

The impartial reader is appealed to, whether this language, in its obvious spirit and import, does not tend to bring into disrepute our best commentators on the Bible. Does it not insinuate, that the Sacred Text is, then only, in a desirable state of purity, and simplicity, when it is exhibited “ without note or comment ;” but when a commentary is annexed, that it is vitiated, or mixed with the doctrines of men? But who are these men? Who are these modern theologues? Are these men, so lightly and sneeringly designated, the illustrious divines, whom we were once taught to venerate as the glory of our church and nation, whose doctrines were pure, whose lives were spotless, whose employment was piety, whose relaxation was philosophy, whose works were recommended to the youth of our universities, aspiring to the ministry, as their best guides in the difficult study of the Sacred Writings, and with whose posthumous fame are closely interwoven the safety, stability, and reputation of that church, of which, when alive, they were the proudest ornaments?

The words above quoted, and which embellish, or tarnish, almost every page of the Bible Society’s reports, must astonish and afflict every thinking man sincerely attached to the genuine doctrine and external prosperity of our national church. What! are the ashes

of the illustrious dead to be raked from their tombs, and scattered to the winds for the gratification of the open or disguised enemies of our ecclesiastical establishment? Are their literary labours, their ardent zeal in the service of religious truth, their patient and successful investigation of the sense of the Sacred Records—to be insulted with a sneer, or assailed with a metaphor?—Where were the lords spiritual and temporal who are members of the Bible Society,—the beneficed clergy—the opulent commoners?—where were the heads of ancient and illustrious families, whose ancestors braved danger, proscription, and death, in defence of our civil and ecclesiastical institutions?—were they all absent from the general meetings of the association, when these irreverent words were written, spoken, read, and ordered to be printed?

Now, it seems, if a Biblical student consults the commentary of Locke, or Taylor, on the Epistles, to assist him in discovering the meaning of the Apostle, he is to be stigmatized as a servile wretch, who “takes his faith upon trust, and believes by proxy!” If this imputation be fair, where are we to look for intellectual independence? Not in this world,—not, at least, in civilized society. The use of commentators is perfectly consistent with the fullest and freest exercise of our understanding. If the understanding be not convinced, the gloss is rejected; if it be, a new truth is acquired, which may not otherwise be discovered, and, in either case, an act of judgment is invariably exerted. Nor is any exercise more improving to the mind, than that of comparing different commentators with each other. If they disagree in opinion, the judgment of the reader is the ar-

biter of the dispute, hears the allegations of the parties, and, after mature deliberation, pronounces its free and final decision.

SECTION XIX.

It cannot be denied, that the fathers of the church were strangely deficient in Scriptural knowledge, and that the Bible is better understood, at the present day, than it had been, at any period, since the first century of the Christian era. The labours of every preceding age, in interpreting the Scriptures, facilitated those of the subsequent; and every successive generation was anxious to increase that stock of Biblical knowledge, which had been transmitted to them by their forefathers. In the last century, the progress was more than usually rapid—not only because its divines were more enriched by the accumulated acquisitions bequeathed to them by their predecessors, but because their superior literary and scientific qualifications enabled them to conduct, with greater effect, their Scriptural researches.

Here we perceive the inestimable value of written comments on the Sacred Books, as it is by such only, that the discoveries of one age can be transmitted to the next. Hence it also appears, that the works of our “modern theologues,” as they are tauntingly styled, are the sum and substance, revised, enlarged, and retrenched, of whatever had been written in elucidation of the Bible, by the ablest divines of the universal church, in all ages, and are therefore entitled to respect, as monuments of sacred knowledge, which have done honour, not only to our National Establishment, but to Christianity itself.

The same historical fact also suggests an additional argument against the opinion, so universally received among the enthusiasts, so cordially embraced by the Bible Society, and which is, indeed, the great principle of their association—that the “Bible, without note or comment,” is intelligible to the meanest capacity. If the most pious and learned divines of the Christian world have been zealously employed, for seventeen centuries, in expounding the Scriptures,—if so much remained to be accomplished, in the way of interpretation, by the divines of the eighteenth,—and if the subject be not yet exhausted,—something more than a violent presumption seems to be established against the doctrine of Scriptural perspicuity. Here we have “experience and the evidence of facts” on the broadest scale;—here we have, in effect, the universal church of God, arraiging the presumption of the present age, and opposing the experience of eighteen centuries to the crude dictum of modern dreamers. Let us indulge the fanatic tribe in dreams, and visions, provided they confine to themselves the airy gratification; but if, in complaisance to them, the established Clergy, also, will dream, let us endeavour to dissipate their delirium, and rouse them from the deadly and degrading slumber.

SECTION XX.

But the *constitution* of the Bible Society—as well as its operations and language—is objectionable on grounds both of piety and prudence. To the view of the honest

and indignant churchman, it presents a motley and portentous confederacy, of bishops, socinians, deans, deists, archdeacons, quakers, ministers of state, jumpers, whigs, tradesmen, tories, methodists, lords, "gospel ministers," ranters, magistrates, and antipedobaptists. If the ecclesiastical functionaries of other times—if the bishops and inferior Clergy, who adorned the English and Irish churches in the reigns of William, Anne, and the two first Georges, were now permitted to visit the scenes of their pastoral labours, would they not gaze at this moral phenomenon with mute astonishment and intense apprehension? when informed that the object of this omnigenous combination of characters so contrasted, of opinions so discordant, of feelings so repulsive, is to circulate the Bible universally among the peasantry, withholding from them, at the same time, the means of understanding it, which alone could give value to the gift, —would they not suppose that the laity, and, still more, the Clergy, of the Established Church, are labouring under some epidemic frenzy—some preternatural obliquity of intellect? What! associate with the enemies of the church, to put the *whole* Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, deep, intricate, and voluminous as it is, into the hands of labouring peasants, who, at best, owe nothing to education but the mere technical operation of reading!

"Tell me your company, and I'll tell you who you are," an homely but judicious adage—is less inapplicable, on the present occasion, than may seem at first sight. The general meetings of the society—so favourable to the most familiar intercourse,—are held, it is true, but once a year. But the members of the com-

mittees, who represent, not only the persons, but the principles of their constituents, hold frequent meetings, and maintain a familiar and unbroken intercourse with each other. So that the clergy and laity of the Bible Societies, with the prelates and peers at their head, associate freely and familiarly, "by proxy" at least, with the rest of the party-coloured community. Also, in the list of subscribers and benefactors, ostentatiously annexed to the annual reports, the names of sour sectaries and polished dignitaries are ranged together, without any other precedence than what alphabetical order confers. "This solemn league and covenant,"—this liberty and equality of the moral and religious world, fill the mind of the unbiassed observer of passing events with gloomy apprehensions of danger, which time only can reveal, in full maturity and distinct proportions.

But, without attempting to draw aside the forbidden veil of futurity, let us steadily view the effects which have *already* resulted, and are still resulting, from the constitution of the Bible Society. A general persuasion among the lower and middle classes of protestants, that the opinions of the methodists are not so objectionable as had been hitherto supposed, is the natural consequence of this indiscreet and inauspicious union. When the soberest dignitaries of the church unite with hot-headed enthusiasts, in promoting a favourite religious project originated by the latter, enthusiasm and dissent, it is presumed, cannot be bad things. The clergy, also, have thus sanctioned by their authority, the opinion so universal among enthusiasts, and so flattering to their spiritual pride,—that the Bible is intelligible, without any *human* aid, to every

blockhead, however illiterate ; or, why associate with fanatics for its general circulation, without making some provision for its explanation ?

This deference to sectarian notions has exalted the enthusiastic sects, in the eye of the protestant public, and proportionably depressed the clergy of the Establishment. The methodists, of all denominations, do not fail to insinuate, that the concurrence of the clergy in their own favourite measure, was a concession extorted from the monopolizing spirit of the church, no longer able, in this “ age of grace,” to vindicate their lofty pretensions to the exclusive right of public instruction. They are now reluctantly compelled, as is triumphantly asserted, to proclaim by their actions, though their “ pharisaical pride” is not yet sufficiently humbled to acknowledge in express words, that the Prophets, Apostles, and Evangelists, are better teachers of vital Christianity, than “ lazy dignitaries, worldly rectors, and time-serving curates.” And who, it is asked, can fail to see that “ this is the finger of God ?” who does not perceive, that “ the wisdom of the great and the mighty of the earth is confounded by babes and sucklings ?”

SECTION XXI.

Such is the language of men “ mighty in the Scriptures,” for they can repeat them by rote ; and who quote them without mercy, because they are not at all solicitous about the fairness of the application. Acting on the principle of a forced conscription, they have pressed every text of the Bible into their service, and turned the

natural battery of the church against the church itself. Meanwhile the clergy are bland, and obliging, and timid, and temporizing: they would mollify their adversaries with kind words, and a liberal demeanour: they would disarm the Calvinists by leaving the "gospel preachers" in possession of the churches, into which they have surreptitiously crept: but this temporizing spirit will not avail: These spiritual warriors will not relax their efforts, till the standard of Calvin flies on every spire in the United Kingdom. The current of public opinion has already set in against the Established Church; and the Bible Society, whether the prelates *will* see it or not, is unquestionably converted into AN ENGINE FOR ITS DESTRUCTION.

This might have been foreseen. The consequence of an alliance between religious knowledge and spiritual delirium,—between tranquil opulence and aspiring indigence,—could not be doubtful. In a connexion between men who had every thing to lose, and nothing to gain, and men who had every thing to gain, and nothing to lose, there could be no reciprocation of interest. The latter might draw prizes, the former *could* only draw blanks in the unequal lottery. Now, however, retrospection is vain,—for the convention is ratified. But it may not be yet too late to cancel the unequal and degrading compact; and, by a series of measures, equally wise and prompt, rescue the church from the folly of her mistaken friends, and the machinations of her open and secret enemies.

SECTION XXII.

On the foreign operations of the association, it is yet premature to hazard an opinion with any degree of confidence. Respecting this part of the subject, our information is limited; our facts are few; and personal observation is altogether excluded. If, however, the sense of the Sacred Records be inaccessible, without explanation to our own peasantry, we can scarcely expect it will be successfully explored by the semi-barbarous population of the heathen and Mahometan nations. The thickest clouds of prejudice must be dissipated before any considerable number, even of the literati of those countries, can be prevailed on to examine the Scriptures with patient impartiality, and give the cause of Christianity a fair hearing. And should they, in opposition to this prejudice, enter seriously, and honestly, upon the study of the Bible, they will soon feel the want, not only of "notes and comments," but also of the *means of ascertaining the authenticity* of the Sacred Records.

But neither of these are they likely to obtain from the Bible Society, who have already exploded notes and comments on the Bible, and by whom the proofs of its authenticity also, will probably be pronounced unnecessary, in compliment to the enthusiasts, in whose judgment, *inspiration* is the only comment on the Scriptures that can be relied on, and the *only evidence of their authenticity*. But it may not unreasonably be apprehended, that the "King of Persia," the "Mufti of Crimea," the "heathen princes of Siberia," and other exalted friends and

patrons of the Bible Society in the eastern world, will soon shrink from the toil of investigating, without note, comment, or inspiration, the sense of the Sacred Records. They will, I doubt not, open the magnificent volume—the gift of the Bible Society,—admire the beauty of its typography, its external splendour, and, while novelty charms, order some of the favoured personages who are admitted into their august presence, to read to them occasionally a few of its pages for the gratification of their “sublime and royal curiosity.” But few, it is feared, will follow the example of Sabat: few will be found to enter seriously upon the study of the “Bible without note or comment,” and fewer still to ascertain its doctrines, imbibe its spirit, and comprehend the grand scheme of the Christian dispensation.

The great triumphs of Christianity over heathenism, idolatry, and infidelity, have been achieved, in all ages, by *preaching* the Scripture, by *expounding* the Scripture, by pressing its momentous truths, with the clearness and energy of oral illustration, on the attention of a reluctant and unbelieving world. By force of arms, also, the pale of Christianity has been somewhat enlarged in opposition to its spirit, and its interests have been occasionally promoted by other means less illegitimate. But no history records any considerable conquest over Heathenism or Mahometanism, by the mere instrumentality of the Bible;—a fact strongly corroborative of the position which I have been, all along, endeavouring to establish—that the Scriptures are “hard to be understood.”

The commission which the Apostles received from their Divine Master was “go—*preach* the gospel to every crea-

ture:" not a word of "circulating the Bible without note or comment." And though the Scriptures were translated into various languages, and copies of them multiplied, in the early ages of the Christian church, we have reason to think they were designed for the use of believers, not of unbelievers—for persons already converted to Christianity, not for those who yet remained to be converted. If the circulation of the Bible were the right mode of converting the heathen, may we not be permitted to suppose, that, in the arrangement of Providence, the invention of printing would have preceded the promulgation of Christianity, as this circulation might, thus, be cheaply, easily, and rapidly effected: especially, as God could have as easily annexed miraculous powers to the Sacred Volume, as to the persons of the Apostles?

"But the fullness of time" for the appearance of Him who was to be "a light to lighten the gentiles" was long antecedent to the era of printing; because, as may be humbly presumed, a Bible, however fairly printed, would be a "sealed book" to the heathen. Hence, it can scarcely be doubted, that preaching is the appointed way for the conversion of infidels. The efforts of modern missionaries; however, have not been successful in proportion to their zeal: from whence we may conclude, that they have been defective in qualification, if not injudicious in conduct, or that the nations of the earth are not yet ripe for the general reception of Christianity. The zeal, however, of all these missionaries has been unquestionable, and the religious attainments of many, highly respectable. When, therefore, such men have failed, who can expect success

from the circulation of the Bible in its “naked simplicity?”

SECTION XXIII.

As to the circulation of the Scriptures, in foreign nations, *within* the pale of Christianity, it is sufficient to observe—that wherever the supply of Bibles is inadequate to the *real* wants of the country, the evil, especially when it springs from the poverty of the people, ought to be remedied. This the Bible Society, with a laudable liberality, have done in many instances. But they push their liberality to a vicious excess. Not content with providing a Bible for every church, every Clergyman, and every individual capable of understanding it, they attempt to supply the *fancied* wants of every peasant in the community. Nay, one of their body affirms, in his correspondence, that he can never be happy till every man and *woman* in Sweden has a Bible.

In the 11th Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society, is stated a most important fact, namely—“that there are more marks of a religious disposition, directed to the proper object of worship, among the Icelanders, taken as a body, than among any other people in Europe: and that they are well acquainted with the *general* contents of the Sacred Volume.” Doubtless the reader will imagine that the Bible must have been “an inmate of every house and cottage” in Iceland. But how great will his astonishment be, when informed by the Bible Society itself—“that there were only two or three Bibles in two parishes; in one *populous* parish *none at all*; and that

one clergyman had been *seeking, in vain, to obtain a Bible for the long period of seventeen years!* What a pregnant fact is this! The most pious, amiable, and orderly nation in Europe with scarcely more Bibles than parishes! How strikingly does this fact exemplify the opinion, for which I have been all along contending? Here we have a practical proof, that the common people may be excellent Christians, though the Bible is not an “inmate” of *any* “cottage.” And if for several years it had been “an inmate of *every* cottage,” who will take upon himself to say, that the Icelanders would not now be a rabble of frantic enthusiasts, uncharitable bigots, or spiritual dreamers, instead of the most devout, amiable, and enlightened peasantry in Christendom; but any observations on this valuable fact only weaken its effect.

More forcible than eloquence, it thus admonishes the Bible Society:—You great reformers of mankind, give the abovementioned Clergyman the best Bible in your collection. He deserves it; and knows how to transfuse its spirit into the hearts of his hearers. But spare the peasants of Iceland,—spare the happy flock whose pastor he is, and whose wants he so well supplies. For them *he* prepares their spiritual food? for them *he* draws water from the fountain of life. Suffer him to do so still; for, alas! *they* want strength to draw the one, *they* want skill to prepare the other. Countermand then the orders you have issued. Withhold your intended gift. On the luxuriant pasture they may droop, they may decline, they may die: or, in wanton mood, rove without control, and disregard the voice of the shepherd.

SECTION XXIV.

But I must not withhold from the Bible Society, my humble, yet sincere tribute of unqualified approbation, for their noble efforts in promoting translations of the Scriptures into all the languages of the heathen and Mahometan world. This is an act of unparalleled sublimity in the conception, and generosity in the execution. That I can, on this occasion, echo the plaudits of the most determined admirers of the Bible Society, without suspicion or flattery, is to me matter of high gratification. To every independent prince on earth, whether Pagan or Mahometan, a superb Bible, in his own language, should be sent as a present, from the sovereign of the United Kingdom; and every man of letters, in those benighted regions, ought to have it in his power to procure a copy of the Holy Scriptures, should curiosity ever excite him to an examination of their contents.

This grand measure may lead to important results. In order to its accomplishment, various languages, hitherto but little known, must be learned,—grammars and vocabularies will be composed,—and the acquisition of these tongues by Europeans rendered practicable, or facilitated. Between Christians and unbelievers, will thus be opened a freer intercourse, which may gradually introduce among the latter the rudiments of our arts, of our literature, of our civil polity, and of our religion: and these seeds, however sparingly scattered, may imperceptibly ripen into the kindred blessings of civiliza-

tion and Christianity. But any attempt to circulate the Scriptures, among the great body of the people, seems liable, on many accounts, to serious objections.

We should be, instantly, suspected of a design of subverting the established superstitions. This would be considered a prelude to the political subjection of the natives. Their national pride would be wounded; their hatred of every thing Christian exalted to a pitch of desperation; and the Bible, now, perhaps, an object only of indifference, regarded with feelings of the bitterest abhorrence. Thus, it is extremely possible, that the Bible Society, by a system of injudicious and precipitate measures, may retard for ages the general reception of Christianity, if, in the counsels of Providence, that glorious event be left dependant on human agency, or second causes.

SECTION XXV.

But where is this circulation of Bibles to end? The principle it proceeds on is indefinite; are the operations of the society to be indefinite also; or are both to be limited only by the ends of the earth? Without a violation of consistency, or an avowal of bankruptcy, the efforts of the association cannot be discontinued, till the Bible is an "inmate of every cottage" or wigwam on the globe. But what a prospect does this open to the view;—interminable expense, endless labour, new financial expedients! The revenue of the society, even now, is drawn, perhaps, from no legitimate source. It is drawn, I fear, from the fund appropriated to the relief of the indigent.

Every member, when paying his subscription or donation, considers himself as contributing to a charitable purpose. But the aggregate amount of the sums annually contributed for charitable purposes, by no means increases with the increased number of objects among whom it is to be distributed.

Men are rather misers than spendthrifts, in the exercise of this amiable virtue. If a new object of charity, or what is so *considered*, start up, and is liberally attended to, the former objects fare more scantily. Different charities interfere with each other. If men subscribe to the Bible Society, they will be less liberal to other charities. Thus considerable sums are diverted into a new channel, which would otherwise flow into the treasury of the poor. Surely this cannot be right. "Feed the hungry, clothe the naked, instruct the ignorant," said the great founder of our religion: circulate "Bibles without note or comment," says the Bible Society. Yet it is *not certain*, that Bibles, without suitable explanations, will make the labouring poor better Christians; but it is quite certain, that food and raiment will fill the souls of the suffering poor with gladness, and prolong the existence of a famishing fellow-creature. It is also certain, that works of love have a natural tendency to excite in the hearts of their objects the purest affections; such as gratitude to their earthly benefactors and to the ultimate Giver of all good;—affections, perhaps, long extinguished by the pressure of misfortune and human unkindness.

Thus hope may revisit the breast; religion revive; and all the feelings of the man and the Christian rush into adoration. Can the Bible Society calculate how much good,

—how much pure religion—their institution has obstructed in this way ; can they calculate how much it will obstruct, before every “cottage” on earth is furnished with a Bible? Their revenue now amounts to £100,000 a year,—an immense sum in the eye of any sovereign in Europe, except *one*. What a sum to divert from the relief of the poor, in a season of unprecedented distress, when even the proprietor of widely-extended domains can scarcely command a sum sufficient to discharge the bill of a starving tradesman ; when the importunate cry of hunger assails the ear on every side, in the midst of plenty,—plenty which mocks the eye, and eludes the grasp of penniless indigence!

On men tottering into pauperism, under the pressure of the times, a considerable part of this vast sum is levied, by means of Bible associations, penny-a-week societies, parochial contributions, “gospel preaching,” artful flattery, and ceaseless importunity! The hard-earned half-crown—the fruit of patient servitude—is elicited from the packthread purse of the daughter of labour, whose eulogy is pronounced, and generosity recorded in the reports of the Bible Society! I do not like this: it is at variance with our best feelings. But what, if the whole system of the Society be an illusion,—what, if the very principle of their incorporation be erroneous,—what, if the Bible, after all, is a book “hard to be understood,” and unfit, in its “naked simplicity,” for the perusal of the common people?—if so, what shall we say of the Society’s perseverance in measures tending only to foment religious delusion in the multitude ;—what shall we say of their supporting these measures by

vast sums, levied, *ex parte*, on those who have but little, and withheld, *in toto*, from those who have nothing? Let us say they are men, and therefore fallible; but let us add, in the sincerity of our hearts,—“ Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

That the members of the church, for it is with them only I would expostulate, and particularly the clergy who have joined the Bible Society, are under the influence of illusion, is incontrovertible; if the writer of these sheets, which, alas! is very possible, be not himself the slave of illusion. But he can honestly affirm, that he has attentively watched the progress of the Bible Society in all its ramifications, and that of the enthusiasts, especially the “ evangelical ministers;”—that he has invariably grounded his opinions on facts presented, for the most part, to his own observation, partly derived from general history, the report of the Bible Society, the publications of its friends, and frequent conversation with its admirers;—but that he has always listened with strong suspicion to the statements and insinuations of its enemies.

SECTION XXVI.

The cry of the “ church is in danger,” has been raised, though feebly, in England—a cry sometimes heard without any sufficient cause, and too often employed as the watch-word of faction: but never, since the days of Laud, has it been uttered with more truth than at present; and the slight impression, which the alarm seems to have made, can be accounted for, only, from the mag-

nitude of the danger. A great part of the Protestant population is already lost to the church ; a great part is neutralized, or meditating a defection. The former do not echo the cry, because they are pleased at the fact it announces ; the latter are silent from a principle of indifference. The clergy overawed, perhaps, by " the signs of the times," vigorously pressed by their enemies, and feebly supported by their friends, preserve, in general, a guarded silence, as if afraid of the sound of their own voices ; and affect to despise a danger, which they want courage to encounter. The danger, however, is felt, if not acknowledged ; and the only rational question is, how its approach is to be retarded, or its attack repelled ?

Measures of prevention have been frequently suggested to the church, by the regrets of her friends, and reproaches of her enemies. A more vigilant inspection on the part of the bishops—more zeal, in the discharge of their clerical functions, on the part of the inferior clergy, are strongly recommended. Official supineness is affirmed, with too much truth, to pervade every part of the system ; and the want of a more appropriate education, for youth aspiring to the ministry, feelingly lamented. In England, and particularly in the district of the metropolis, the parochial church, in some parishes, is incapable, we are told, of containing one-twentieth part of the parishioners ; in others, it is too remote from the great mass of population. Hence, the necessity of building new churches, enlarging others, subdividing parishes, and increasing the number of officiating ministers.

These measures can be effected by episcopal energy, seconded by legislative enactments, which may remove

the obstacles arising from the selfishness of incumbents, the rights of patronage, and the operation of poor laws. But this subject has been discussed, at large, in various publications, some of which feelingly detail the present state of the church, ascribe its danger to the want of churches and church room, to the worldly habits and spiritual somnolency of many of its functionaries, and to a general laxity of ecclesiastical discipline.

These evils—and they are serious ones—doubtless exist, though not surely in the degree assigned; and are justly numbered among the causes of that growing defection, from the banners of the church to the standard of dissent, which threatens the former with such imminent danger. There is, however, another and a powerful cause of danger, not only to the Established Church, but to Christianity itself, as a *reasonable service*—THE AGENCY OF THE BIBLE SOCIETY. This agency, and its ruinous tendency, it has been the main object of the writer of these pages to develop. How far he has succeeded the public must determine. That, however, he has endeavoured to call the general attention to a subject, in his eyes, of awful importance, is to him matter of pleasing reflection. By these short and imperfect hints others may be roused to a discussion of the question, whose genius and leisure may expand the subject to its just dimensions by force of argument, and felicity of illustration. The services of the dwarf, who, by sounding the alarm, saved the citadel from a surprise, were not deemed contemptible.

THE END.

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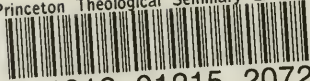
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